



SAME SEAT, NEW VIEW

MOVING BEYOND

THE “MOVE”

MENTALITY

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MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS everywhere are declaring career development a casualty of today’s business and economic landscape. And it’s easy to understand why: the workplace is not the wide-open playing field we once enjoyed.

- Boomers are waiting longer to retire.
- Repeated rounds of belt-tightening have led to delayering and downsizing.
- The corporate ladder looks more like a slice of pie that’s narrowing to almost nothing.
- More jobs are outsourced.
- And the list goes on.

All of this breeds a sense of scarcity and leaves the impression of fewer opportunities. Is it any wonder that leaders avoid career discussions with employees? Who wants to set unrealistic expectations? Who wants to disappoint others when desirable moves are so few and far between?

REFRAMING CAREER DEVELOPMENT

But today’s changing and demanding conditions make career development more—not less—important than in the past. They also force a new mindset and challenge everyone (leaders and employees alike) to move beyond the “move” mentality.

Certainly some career development involves moves, but (and here’s the best-kept secret that will liberate development-minded managers everywhere) the vast majority do not. Growth isn’t limited to movements over, up, or down. With the right support, people can grow right where they’re planted.

In fact, growth in place is the most accessible yet most underutilized career-development strategy available to managers. Let’s face it. You may have little influence over getting an employee transferred or promoted, but you are completely in charge of what goes on in your own backyard. Finding ways to grow talents, explore interests, and

build capacity within the context of employees’ current jobs is completely within each leader’s sphere of influence.

TANGLED IN TITLES

The old mindset of career development involved a series of moves from position to position, title to title, toward one’s dream job in a particular sequence:

- ▶ *If I want to be (ultimate career goal/position)* _____
- ▶ *Then first I have to be (lower-level title)* _____

In the past, the classic career pattern involved bopping from role to role on the road toward that dream job. But we know that given today’s reality there just may not be that many positions or titles available. Does it mean that people who remain in the same roles are condemned to pickling their minds, extinguishing their spirits, and not developing? (Answer: Absolutely not.)

The new model looks more like this:

- ▶ *If I want to be (ultimate career goal/position)* _____
- ▶ *Then I have to know/be able to (required skills)* _____

“I figured out a long time ago that the job title doesn’t mean nearly as much as the richness of the experiences it offers. Titles belong on books . . . not on people, anyway.”

—RETAIL SUPERVISOR

Let’s face it: even if it were feasible given today’s leaner organizations, developing employees by continually moving them from position to position is exhausting. Development in place acknowledges the reality of the current workplace while meeting the needs of the employee and the organization.

Managers who successfully support others growing in place are opportunity minded. Are you?

OPPORTUNITY-MINDED OR BLINDED

Do you:

- See people as interesting, complex, and multidimensional?
- Pick up on cues that employees are ready for something more?
- Spot strengths that can be used in different or unusual ways?
- See multiple ways of getting work done?
- Squeeze learning from nearly every experience and interaction?
- Cringe when you hear someone say, “But that’s not how we do it around here?”
- View job descriptions as helpful guidelines rather than handcuffs?
- Initiate and engage in an ongoing conversation about how to maximize talent?
- Feel energized by thinking outside of the box?
- Resist seeing the world in terms of round pegs and square holes?

Analysis:

- If you answered yes 8 or more times, you are an opportunity visionary with 20/20 vision when it comes to finding ways to help employees seek out the circumstances they need to gain important skills, knowledge, and experiences.
- If you answered yes 5–7 times, you are opportunity minded and frequently see ways to connect your employees’ career advancement needs with opportunities within the organization.
- If you answered yes 4 or fewer times, you may find that you are turning a blind eye toward opportunities to help your employees advance.

See *Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em: Getting Good People to Stay* (Berrett-Koehler 2008) for more on opportunity mindedness.

The challenge of growing in place involves stripping titles from our thinking and instead focusing on what the employee needs to experience, know, learn, and be able to do.

Call it kismet—or just the product of quality career conversations—but a good manager can nearly always uncover ways to allow employees’ interests and goals to find a home supporting the organization’s needs. Good managers just seem to see opportunities where others do not. Depending on your dictionary, *opportunity* is defined as a set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something—in this case, move forward and toward a personal definition of career success.

Opportunity-minded managers envision and enable possibility-advancing circumstances with employees—through conversation.

CONVERSATION AS THE CONDUIT

This possibility generating is not haphazard. There is a method—and clear structure—to the madness of opportunity-minded managers. They understand that helping employees realize their definitions of career success requires conversations that fall into two distinct categories:

1. **WHAT**—Conversations that focus on what the employee needs in terms of experiences, skills, exposure, and information
2. **HOW**—Conversations that build on WHAT conversations and help the employee figure out how to get those needs met

CAUTION: To build opportunity mindedness in yourself and others, do not confuse these two conversations. Do not be tempted to combine them. And never reverse the sequence. Severe confusion will ensue.

One of the most common mistakes managers make is to jump directly from employees’ career goals and definitions of success to “Here’s what we’re gonna do.” And it’s natural. As a manager, you didn’t get to where you are by not being action-oriented.

Moving prematurely to action causes you to shoehorn the possible into the practical far too early.

It also:

- Sidesteps important thinking
- Chokes off creativity
- Jumps to solutions before you know what the opportunity is
- Narrows the conversation
- Blinds you to the full range of possibilities

MOVING THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDLE WITHOUT THE MOVE

The opportunity-minded share a whole language that shines light on the nearly unlimited ways people can grow in place. Instead of moves, they focus squarely on the objectives of development and the actions (not roles) required to achieve them. They focus on powerful verbs, such as:

Hone - Learn - Specialize - Experience - Cultivate - Practice Enhance - Research - Re-energize

These and other verbs are synonymous with growth . . . and they get people thinking.

Try it. Jointly with an employee, pick a verb and complete the sentence. What might he want to broaden? What might she want to refresh? What might he want to expand? You’ll be surprised by how this simple “fill in the blanks” approach can point employees in new and sometimes invisible directions. It also establishes or maintains momentum forward and toward employees’ career goals. And these sample verbs are just the beginning!

Helping employees think critically about the experiences and learning they need to move forward and toward their career goals is career development.

A PERENNIAL STRATEGY

When leaders and employees alike move beyond the move mindset, they tap into a strategy that works in good times and bad, when belts are tight or a little looser, when staffing is lean or more generous. Because, regardless of external conditions, there are always countless ways people can develop and grow right now and right where they are. ■

Adapted from the book *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go: Career Conversations Employees Want* (2012), by Beverly Kaye and Julie Winkle Giulioni. Beverly Kaye is founder and co-CEO of Career Systems International, specializing in engagement, retention, and development. She is a well-known keynote speaker, writer, and developer of innovative learning tools. She can be reached at BEVERLY.KAYE@careersystemsintl.com. Julie Winkle Giulioni is cofounder and principal of DesignArounds, a bicoastal consulting and instructional design firm. She works with organizations globally to develop and implement learning that works. She can be reached at JULIE@juliewinklejulioni.com.